

How to Choose the Correct Fastpitch Softball Bat

No matter the softball league you play in, buying a bat is a personal decision. New technology has delivered bats that not only enhance performance but also are tailored to an individual player's strengths. It is essential that you select a bat that fits your unique body configuration and skill level--height, weight, and hitting strength.

Understanding Bat Materials

The world of bats now offers a large variety of choices in materials. These can be broken into two primary categories--aluminum and Graphite/Titanium lined. Virtually no softball bats are made of wood any longer. Each provides its own unique characteristics.

Aluminum

This has been a player favorite for several years now. Aluminum bats provide a lighter weight for increased control and bat speed. Aluminum and the other metals also offer durability because these bats are extremely difficult to crack or break. Aluminum bats come in a variety of alloys, each with a different weight. Generally, lighter aluminum alloys are thinner and more durable. These lighter weights also increase the "sweet spot," the hitting zone on the bat's barrel that gives the maximum place to put metal to ball. Aluminum bats, and those enhanced with other alloys (Hybrids), also come in single-layer or double-layer construction. Double-layer bats offer more durability and power, since the ball rebounds off the bat with more authority.

Graphite/Titanium lined

Technology has enabled bat makers to use lighter, stronger materials. Graphite and Titanium are just two of these. Both are usually added to thinner-wall aluminum bats, enabling bats to be lighter and increasing a player's swing speed. These materials also increase durability and the batter's sweet spot. Graphite and Titanium also help reduce vibration and the sting of ball shock, the tingling feeling sent to the hands usually when you miss hitting the ball in the bat's sweet spot. Also, make sure your bat is USSSA certified by looking for the logo on the bat you purchase.



One Piece Bats: Typically stiffer and more balanced. The one piece design does not allow for more vibration control, so they will often have a lot of vibration on miss-hit balls.

Two Piece Bats: Tend to have more flex and have less vibration.

Generally speaking, contact hitters benefit from one piece bats for the better balance, and power hitters benefit more from the two piece bats for the added flex. The choice between the two is based on your personal preference and hitting style.

Determine What Bat Fits Your Body

There are some standard rules of thumb in selecting the appropriate bat length. The charts below offer some guidelines based on age and weight and height:

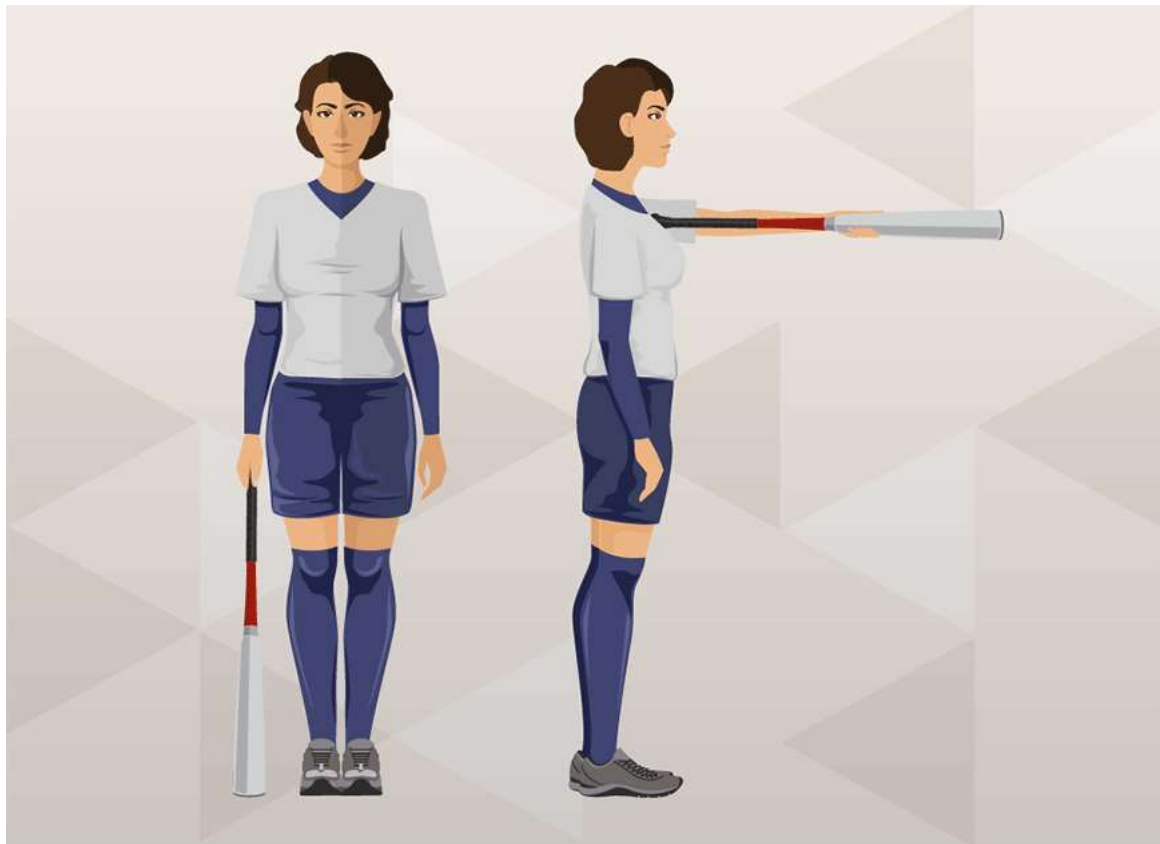
Age	Under 7	8-9	10-11	12-13	14 and Over
Length	24"-26"	26"-29"	28"-31"	29"-33"	31"-34"
Drop	(-13.5)-(-10)	(-13.5)-(-10)	(-13)-(-8)	(-12)-(-8)	(-10)-(-8)

Weight/Height 3'5" - 3'8" 3'9" - 4' 4'1" - 4'4" 4'5" - 4'8" 4'9" - 5' 5'1" - 5'-4" 5'5" - 5'-8" 5'9" - 6' 6'1" - Over'

Under 60 lbs	27"	28"	29"	29"					
61 - 70 lbs	27"	28"	29"	30"	30"				
71 - 80 lbs	28"	28"	29"	30"	30"	31"			
81 - 90 lbs	28"	29"	29"	30"	30"	31"			
91 - 100 lbs	29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	31"		
101 - 110 lbs	29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"		
111 - 120 lbs	29"	29"	30"	30"	31"	31"	32"		
121 - 130 lbs		30"	30"	30"	31"	32"	32"	33"	
131 - 140 lbs		30"	30"	30"	31"	32"	32"	33"	33"
141 - 150 lbs		30"	30"	31"	31"	32"	33"	33"	33"
151 - 160 lbs		30"	31"	31"	31"	32"	33"	33"	34"
161 - 170 lbs			31"	31"	32"	32"	33"	33"	34"
171 - 180 lbs				31"	32"	32"	33"	34"	34"
Over 180 lbs						33"	33"	34"	34"

After you've selected the proper bat size to use by calculating all the numbers and referring to the bat length chart, there are some additional ways to determine whether or not it is the right size: Put the bat to your side and as long as your palm reaches the handle, you have the right sized bat.

Put the knob of the bat at the center of your chest with the bat facing outward - if you can reach your arm out and grab the barrel of the bat, it's the right size.



Determining the Right Bat Weight

Most bats are weighted in ounces. Manufacturers have done a great job in balancing the bat's weight to its length. Many bats have a weight-to-length ratio (**Drop**), often shown as -4, -6, etc. This basically means a 30-inch bat with a -10 ratio weighs 20 ounces. Selecting weight really depends on two critical factors-- your strength, and your hitting style. Bigger, stronger players prefer a heavier bat since they get the benefits of both the heft and swing power. Smaller players with less strength should consider a lighter bat to generate a quicker swing. Younger players, too, should consider that a lighter bat increases control, great for singles hitters.

Most importantly: A bat that is too heavy will break down proper swing mechanics. Buying a bat that is too heavy is a common mistake. When making a bat purchase, make sure you lean toward lighter bats to protect swing integrity while reducing risk of injury.